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Thank you for the opportunity to address your Committee. .

As a current member of the Wide Bay Burnett Area Consultative Committee, I have previously provided a submission to this Enquiry – the focus of which was on economic development. I now ask your Committee to consider the future direction of Regional Development Australia from a community perspective. (*Appendix 1* provides some background as to my years of community representation)



As one of the 1000 delegates to the 2020 Summit at Canberra in April, 2008, (where I participated in the “*Future directions for rural industries and rural communities*”,) I am confident that my comments provide grass-roots community input to your committee.

Aware that your “*Issues Paper*” informs discussions here to-night I accept that this program is about “*A new regional and local community infrastructure program*” (*Page 3*), and the framework which will encompass it. I target my comments accordingly.

The parameters of your brief will not include social and welfare issues. They, however, will inform the need for community infrastructure, so it is critical that your Committee understands existing social capital, networks and linkages –

I hope my comments will give you an accurate picture of our region – and our community needs, but I will address the broader issues first:-.

1. Regional Australia, does not believe that decision makers, at either Federal or State level, understand what constitutes a region, or that each region is different. This is relevant to your question (*Page 3*) – “*How should regional be defined?*”. To us a region consists of regional hubs, regional centres, rural and remote – linking to larger provincial areas, and then into metropolitan areas. These regions need to be accepted as “communities of interest” – not lines on a geographical map – which are often interpreted differently by the 3 levels of Government. To illustrate this lack of understanding by city-centric decision-makers, I have attached as *Appendix 2* a copy of the interim report of this 2020 stream – the final report is due 31-12-2008. Note that the name remains “rural”, but let me assure you that, within 30 minutes of discussion there was unanimous agreement by all that there is insufficient delineation, and the report contains references to the 3 R’s – regional, rural and remote. To the regional stream summiteers there seemed to be this mind-set that, if it’s not urban – it’s rural, and I’m pleased to see that the new RDA is, at least, asking this critical question. Each level of “regionality” requires different levels of hard and soft infrastructure – and while your program looks only at the “hard” infrastructure – knowing the local issues helps inform decisions – because one can’t exist without the other
2. So! – what creates a region? The answer is simple – jobs. But they must be jobs which are both enduring and expansive. Good economic development, creating real, sustainable jobs leads to good community, commercial and Government partnerships. Governments do not create sustainable jobs – private enterprise does. The new RDA should include – as it has previously done – partnerships with private enterprise. And our region bears testimony to that concept.

3. Many of the regions already have efficient and effective community networks and linkages. Better understanding, utilization and expansion of the existing linkages – not further layers of bureaucracy and extra management – will deliver better community and commercial results
4. Whilst there is often healthy regional parochialism, a genuine need for regional improvement exists, and should be fostered. As Governments continue to move out of service provision devolving it to other levels of Government (often without monetary compensation) and to Not-for-profit community organizations, the current inflexible, competitive funding processes can do more harm than good.
5. Australia's population is ageing, with increasing community needs at the same time as the tax base decreases. Our region is part of the "sea-change" "tree-change" phenomenon – which provides opportunities – as well as a critical need for increased infrastructure and pro-active planning. This is well documented by the April, 2007 Intergenerational Report, and I attended a presentation of this by Treasury, to National aged-care providers in Canberra in April, 2008.

So! – what about OUR region?. It's simply the best, but we need some help. You would be aware this region has a higher than average number of aged, disabled and welfare dependent people – and this phenomenon is increasing. We have a lower than average disposable income – but we are a very self-help community.

Regions generally support that which they create, which is why partnerships are important. More importantly – we don't need to re-invent the wheel. We just need to get smarter and value-add to what we have. Let me expand on the issue of partnerships and community infrastructure:-

- (a) As a community person I made the application for the funding of the proposed Lake Ellen Heritage Hub – an excellent example of all levels of Government, the community and private enterprise working as a joint partnership. The Regional Partnerships application process was a nightmare, I had to do 8 different versions of it and it would never have been accomplished without the assistance of the CEO and staff of our Wide Bay Burnett ACC. This project became a matter of national publicity when the Federal Government reneged because the contract was incomplete at the time of the 2007 Federal Election. The incomplete contract resulted because the City Council, as one of the 5 (Federal/State/Local Govs.-community and private enterprise) partners, had to go through a further hurdle of proving it was a financially sustainable and accountable entity before the contract could proceed. I have been advised to-day that a date for completion of the project has now been negotiated with all parties. However, the community impact and loss of momentum were huge – and could, and should have been avoided. Shifting goalposts mid-stream destroys community trust, acceptance and commitment – ultimately no one wins, and our community is the loser. If all now proceeds, given that Council amalgamations also intervened, at a later date, then – 18 months later our community could have its community playground – which includes a "liberty-swing" for the district's disabled, wheel-chair bound children.

It is, as you can see, difficult to promote effective public/private partnerships, which often involve communities that use volunteers, if the process is a total disincentive to achieving the outcome.

- (b) Our community has been the victim of macro-economic policy and reform (The Great Barrier Marine Park Authority, Pork, Dairy and Sugar Reforms). As a

“regional hub” these macro policies have detrimental micro impacts – something which is not understood by the two tiers of Government which imposed them. That’s why it’s important not to see regions as lines on a map in someone’s office in Canberra or George Street, but to understand where they fit within the broader “regional” concepts. These impacts have increased social and welfare demands.

I will now paint a picture of social pressures on our community. Whilst acknowledging that your program cannot address the core problem, it will help you understand why we, as a community need some help with infrastructure. Your recommendations as to some Federal policy changes to help us all work smarter and more effectively, better utilizing existing infrastructure – before we start building more – would also be helpful.

- (c) The provision of aged care and disability services(not to mention health)- for our region is in crisis – and has been for the past 15 years. It is a matter of statistical record that people with disability are now living longer, with family carers who are, themselves, ageing – and often in need of care themselves. Aged care is delivered by one Federal Department, disability by another, and Home and Community Care (jointly) – to adhere to Federal and State social policy and there is no, or insufficient interface, between Departments and other levels of Government. This is particularly so with Aged Care Assessments which determine the financial responsibility of future lifestyle care, and options for all Australian communities.
- (d) State Parliamentary records confirm that there have been 250 applications to Disability Services Queensland over the past 5 years for Lifestyle Support Packages – i.e. continued funding for people with a disability in need of care and supported accommodation. My own son, now deceased, is probably one of those statistics, back in 2003. That means 245 desperate families are still trying to cope with providing care, and I table(*Appendix 3*) the Hansard record for this committee’s consideration.. As a family advocate I work, voluntarily, with many of these families. The current position is intolerable, and a disgrace to the policies and funding of both Federal and State Governments.

Should any community accept that an 86 year old mother, who has provided a lifetime of care and community service to try and build local services for her intellectually disabled son, is now a prisoner in her own home (her family’s words – not mine”) because no provision has been made for people who age prematurely?. (My own son, now deceased, was prematurely aged at 35) The service provider can no longer provide care in the previous residential situation, because of premature ageing issues. So, an 86 year old mother is, yet again, the primary carer of a 50 year old ageing, intellectually disabled son

This has happened because of the lack of interface between Federal and State Governments and guidelines for Aged Care Assessment (Federal responsibility), which refuse to accept that our family members with these lifetime disabilities are now, often, outliving their parents, due to modern technology and improved medical intervention. It is my own personal experience – verifiable by many of our local families that “as long as families can cope – they will be made to cope” –

Ample medical evidence confirms these people, who previously seldom lived beyond 30-40 years of age, are now ageing prematurely. They do not fit neatly into the Federal Government's 65+ for recognition of aged care funding. There should be more flexibility for aged care assessments – which **DO NOT** put these people into nursing homes, but trigger a pro-active planning process better utilizing existing services, and funding pro-active solutions.

Current cases in which I am involved include younger parents, without sufficient family and respite support, relinquishing their beloved family members to the State. The disabled child, often with high support needs, becomes a ward of the State and foster families will get far more assistance and recognition than natural parents ever could/or did.

Our community does not find it acceptable for grandparents (75+) to become primary carers of their disabled grandchildren – because that's the only alternative – or that young adults, (22yrs.) with permanently acquired brain damage resulting from traumatic illness should have no alternatives locally – or indeed in Brisbane – other than a nursing home for the aged. Some 9 months later the disabled young adult is still on a “waiting list” for the inappropriate placement to a nursing home because her needs, at home, cannot be met by her caring family, and the hospital needs “the bed” . .

Equally, our frail aged residents face similar problems because there is a lack of aged care beds and a gap between the allocation of beds and the provision of these places. It is very easy for Government to state that the delay in this infrastructure is the result of Local Government costs, fees and red tape. Let me assure this Committee that, as the previous Chair of Planning and Development for the Bundaberg City Council that is not the case here. The providers were not “bed-ready” and 3 or 4 years down the track we are still waiting for 120 beds to materialize.

These instances of the lack of flexible interface and funding in the Federal Government, between different departments within the Federal and State Governments, and an insistence that NFP service providers should be able to meet an increasing demand with fewer resources and increased red tape are not limited to this region. My experience as a national advocate confirms it is a national problem.

Communities accept there is no infinite bucket of money from any level of Government, and are also realizing that Local Government, which often provided their “fall back” position, at least in Queensland, is no longer able to assist. Councils are struggling to overcome problems created by inadequate State Government resourcing of the recent forced amalgamations.

To this end then, it is critical that the new Regional Development Australia accepts the need for a “whole of Government” approach to working with the regions in meeting both soft and hard infrastructure for those communities. Economic Development cannot be divorced from social development – they depend on each other, and private enterprise has an important community role as well. This is particularly so with poker machines and their community impact.:-

The Federal and State Governments will continue to devolve the delivery of specialized services for Australian communities to not-for-profit organizations. Therefore, they have an obligation to ensure those NFP and welfare organizations, to which those responsibilities are devolved, are not deprived of the resources to provide those essential services.

In tabling this report on Poker Machines for the previous Bundaberg City and Burnett Council areas (76,000 population),(Appendix 4) I draw attention to the fact that the Queensland State Government has taken \$30m from this region over the past 3 years, and returned \$1.75m, via the Community Benefit Gaming Fund. Some 30% of the funds returned have been for school infrastructure – a State or private responsibility which should come from other funds. The CBGF has a limit of \$30,000 on its grants to individual organizations. That cap needs to be higher. RDA could well find they will receive more call on their funds for such infrastructure when, with a fairer policy the State Government could be meeting some of these costs – from funds provided, indirectly, by the very communities requiring assistance.

This \$30m is from this region only, covers only poker machines – not the extra revenue from licenses, transfers or ancillary State Government revenue from other forms of gambling. While accepting the social benefits of employment created by the poker machine industry, we must also accept that the charity dollar is now incapable of providing the charity and welfare supports expected of NFP organizations, nationally and/or at community levels. In light of this impact, it is reasonable for our community to expect that a greater percentage of this community income is returned back to the communities of origin. The community is the loser, and a return of 50% - not 05% is more reasonable.

Perhaps this social picture is not part of your brief, so I have asked myself – how does **your** brief help us solve some of these social/welfare/infrastructure issues. I would envisage an RDA/State /Local and/or commercial partnership program to build a facility that would cater for ageing people with a disability in a cluster housing program. I would further envisage a similar model that provides for disabled people who are younger, with degenerative disorders, and for whom a nursing home placement is inappropriate. In fact, our community would say that, if we could get back even half of the \$30m poker machine tax (a further \$13m) of the poker machine tax, which has damaged the capacity of local organizations to provide such solutions, we could solve some our own problems – with a bit of help from programs like RDA.. Our city services a region of approx.140,000.

In summary – I am recommending that:-

- 1. Community development, in unison with economic development, should be integral components of the new Regional Development Program.**
- 2. New RDA funding application and assessment processes include assessment by local appointees, within the agreed time-frames**

- 3. Private enterprise should play an integral role**
- 4. "Regional hubs", and their extra "soft and hard" infrastructure obligations should be both recognised and resourced**
- 5. The allocation of more aged care beds to meet community needs in this region.**
- 6. More flexibility for community infrastructure and service providers in funding with, perhaps, some direct funding via Federal coffers i.e. – similar to the R2R model of service delivery.**
- 7. A relaxation of the 65+ aged care entitlement thresholds for people with disability – especially lifetime disability. Premature ageing for some of these people is a medical reality at 40 years of age, and the current Aged Care Assessment process must recognize the changing nature of longevity and medical intervention in individual cases, where it is supported by medical evidence.**
- 8. The development of some partnerships between Federal/State/Local Governments and communities to plan local alternative accommodation solutions for people with disability who are ageing and young adults with 'term of life", or acquired disability. Such an approach aligns with Federal social policy of "ageing in place".**
- 9. Federal intervention to ensure that, when communities – and the provision of services, by those communities are disadvantaged by State taxes –i.e. poker machine taxes, there is an equitable return of those community dollars back to the communities of origin. A 5% return on yearly state revenue of \$10m, which imposes community disadvantage, is not considered equitable, and 50% is more appropriate.**
- 10. The separation of disability and aged care – at all Government levels**
- 11. A funded, dedicated advocacy body for family carers of people with a disability .**

Thank you for this opportunity. The pictures I have painted are to ensure that the RDA does include community development as an integral part of its new framework and that new community services infrastructure is locally focused, can only be solved by new infrastructure – not just policy changes, and that public/private partnerships remain an integral part of the restructured ACC .

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